Digital Government Information
The Grand Challenge and Arizona's Response

Libraries and archives in the United States and around the world face a grand challenge, the preservation of our democracy through an informed citizenry in an era when the vast majority of government information is born and often remains digital. Libraries and archives have always played a primary and essential role in providing citizens with the information they need to know to participate in the democratic process. This role is even more critical in the digital government era.

The study *Public Libraries and the Internet 2006: Survey Results and Findings* points out that "as federal, state, and local government agencies migrate their services and resources to e-government applications, they do so without offering any community-based access points to these services. Increasingly, government agencies refer individuals to their public libraries for assistance and technology to complete their interactions and meet their government services needs."[1]

Government agencies see libraries and archives as the place the public can access this information. Agencies are also often unaware of the precarious preservation aspect of digital-only information. Digital government information, unlike paper, will not last unless technological steps are taken to ensure its preservation. In 2006 it was noted that information and forms from FEMA, Medicare, and Immigration were only available online, without a print equivalent being distributed.

While the staff of most public libraries and archives have limited expertise in helping their patrons get access to government information, the staff of the Arizona State Library and Archives have great expertise in this area. Like public libraries and archives, the State Library and Archives has not received increased funding for this work.

The Arizona State Library and Archives continues to take a leadership role in addressing the challenges of capturing, providing access to, and preserving digital government information. The shift from paper to digital formats, coupled with the exponential growth of government information, means that virtually every aspect of the library, archives, and records management professions must be reconsidered. Staff members at the Library and Archives are constantly looking for new ways to transform traditional, paper-based business practices to new methods appropriate for the digital era.

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[1] Bertot, John Carlos, Paul T. Jaeger, Lesley A. Langa, and Charles R. McClure "Public access computing and Internet access in public libraries: The role of public libraries in e-government and emergency situations." First Monday, volume 11, number 9 (September 2006), http://firstmonday.org/issues/issue11_9/bertot/index.html   (10 October 2006).

CONTINUING PROJECTS

The Library and Archives staff continue work on a number of major research projects designed to help library and records professionals address complex, unsolved problems of working with digital information.

Web SafetyNet Archives

Using software developed jointly by the Illinois State Library and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, the State Library captures as many state agency publications on the web as possible. Each month, approximately 60 GB of data is captured from more than 200 web servers. The software is limited and unable to retrieve many documents. The Library and Archives expects to migrate to new, more robust, software when the Web Archives Workbench becomes fully operational in 2007.

Web Archives Workbench

In 2004 the Library of Congress National Digital Information Infrastructure Preservation Program awarded a grant to the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign to develop software to identify state agency websites, then select documents, assign metadata, and harvest non-ephemeral documents. The workflow – commonly referred to as the "Arizona Model" –is based on research done at the State Library and Archives. The harvesting software used in the workbench, developed by the Internet Archive, is capable of acquiring many more documents.

National Archives and Records Administration: Advisory Committee on the Electronic Records Archives

The Archivist of the United States, Dr. Allen Weinstein, asked Richard Pearce-Moses, Director of Digital Government Information, to serve as an advisor to the National Archives and Records Administration's Electronic Records Archives (ERA).

NEW PROJECTS

New Skills for a Digital Era

The State Library and Archives, with the National Archives and Records Administration and the Society of American Archivists, co-sponsored the colloquium "New Skills for a Digital Era." This invitation-only program brought together eighty librarians and records professionals from around the country who had significant practical experience working

with digital information. The group was tasked to address the question, What practical skills do librarians and records professionals need to be able to thrive in an age of digital information?" Proceedings are to be published in the winter of 2007.

Digital Stacks

Storage is a fundamental challenge to digital information. Where paper requires secure, climate-controlled buildings, boxes, and shelves, digital information has different requirements. This year the Library and Archives developed the blueprints for the "digital stacks." The plans include use of software that automatically replicates the data so that it is geographically dispersed and that automatically verifies the data has not become corrupted (and corrects errors, when necessary).

Building the digital stacks will be a major effort, and the Library and Archives has applied to the Library of Congress for a National Digital Information Infrastructure and Preservation Program grant. If awarded, we will partner with the San Diego Supercomputing Center and Stanford University's LOCKSS project to fully implement the system. The grant will also support four other states participation as full partners and ten other states as participants.

Transforming the Archives Profession

This year Pearce-Moses served as the President of the Society of American Archivists. He was able to work with archivists from around the country – and around the world – to address the fundamental question, What do archivists and records managers need to know to thrive in the digital era? Pearce-Moses authored numerous articles and made several presentations. His presidential address, "Janus in Cyberspace: Archives on the Threshold of the Digital Era," is included in the appendix.

Building Capacity for Digital Information Management

Under a grant from the Institute for Museum and Library Services, the School of Information Resources and Library Science at the University of Arizona is developing a post-baccalaureate certificate program to give librarians, archivists, and technologists the knowledge and skills to work with collections of digital information. The certificate program will consist of six courses, and the staff of the Library and Archives is taking a leadership role in the development of the curriculum.